

SESSION 2005: NEW LEADERSHIP FOR CONNECTICUT'S FUTURE

Better government; healthier kids & parents; a commitment to education



SENATE DEMOCRATS

INTRODUCTION



With a new sense of determination, Senate Democrats moved forward this session towards making government more accountable to the people of Connecticut. We embarked upon a new era of responsibility while staying true to our core Democratic values in difficult economic times. This year we made progress in reforming our ethics laws, even as our state continues to recover and respond to the unprecedented events of last year, which were punctuated by the resignation of our former governor. We passed legislation which revamped our Ethics Commission, strengthened standards for contracting, and increased real accountability in how government goes about doing the business of the people it represents. Unfortunately, not all of these proposals were signed into law.

We fought for additional aid to our cities and towns to support education and to keep our property taxes down. The maximization of federal revenue—getting our money back from Washington—remains a priority. We responded with targeted efforts to save our sub base and continue the expansion of our economic development efforts.

We focused our efforts on our kids—what they eat in schools, how to keep them healthy, safe and physically fit. We protected access to health care and saved our HUSKY health care program for the parents of the children in the greatest need. We were successful in our fight to increase the minimum wage. We increased our school readiness dollars while providing more money to towns for general and special education.

This year was also devoted to environmental concerns. We fought hard to protect farmland and open space while enhancing historic preservation and affordable housing. We honored those who serve in our military, past and present, and passed a number of programs to support and thank them. Transportation remained a high priority with more dollars devoted to decreasing gridlock and our dependence on foreign oil. Finally, as a result of thoughtful and prudent budgeting, we made sure that our seniors keep their prescription drug coverage under the ConnPACE program and that new, critical transportation initiatives to keep them independent moved forward.

A NEW STATE BUDGET

The new two-year budget passed by the General Assembly addresses the priorities of Connecticut's citizens in a fair and comprehensive fashion. Many of the programs that were under attack—pared-down or eliminated in the wake of the post-9/11 economic slow down—were restored to their prior funding levels. We fought for additional money for higher education, health care and for our cities and towns resulting in property tax relief. Aid to our municipalities increased by 5%, or \$132 million over last year.

A few highlights of the FY 06/07 budget include:

Human Services

- HUSKY health care insurance for parents with incomes up to 150% of the federal poverty level will be continued (for a family of three, 150% of federal poverty level is \$24,135).
- Funding for more coordinated behavioral health care for children and their families and funding for a more comprehensive continuum of community-based mental health care.
- The Nurturing Families program for new parents will be made available to all hospitals in the state.
- Funding is provided for the state's first Safe Harbor Respite Home for teens with behavioral or social problems.
- Cost of Living increases for private human services providers.
- Significant increases in funding for nursing home rates.
- New funding for gambling addiction and awareness programs.
- A federal cost of living allowance for the blind, aged and disabled for the first time in 15 years.
- A new pilot program will address autistic kids and their special needs.

Education

- The largest expansion of the School Readiness program since its creation (\$10 million in FY06 and \$13 million in FY07).
- \$52 million more than originally proposed for Higher Education.
- \$3.5 million more than originally proposed for charter schools.
- \$62 million more for Education Cost Sharing in FY06 over last year.

General Government

- No increases in bus fares.
- No increases in the tax on gas at the pump.
- \$9 million more than originally recommended for tourism and the arts.
- \$60 million over the biennium to fund collective bargaining agreements.
- \$75 million of the FY 05 surplus will be deposited into the rainy day fund.

ETHICS AND GOVERNMENT REFORM



Campaign Finance Reform

During the campaign season, democracy can be at its best when candidates have a real chance to talk with residents about issues that affect them most. However, as the costs of campaigning increase across the state and country, candidates may spend less time in the future talking about the most pressing issues and more time attending to fundraising. This runs counter to what our democracy is all about, and it works against the best interests of voters. To stem this tide, the state Senate passed a comprehensive campaign finance package that would take some of the special interest money out of politics. The new system would have been paid for with unclaimed bottle deposits. Efforts will continue to reach a workable compromise in both houses of the legislature. **SB 61—passed Senate only**

Reform of the Ethics Commission

Our state continues to recover from and respond to the unprecedented events of last year, which were punctuated by the resignation of our former governor. These events truly tested our system of checks and balances, and we are proud to report that our system worked. Nevertheless, we also learned that some of our checks and balances could be strengthened. As a result, we have improved oversight of ethical conduct by establishing an independent Citizens' Ethics Advisory Board to better ensure that officials adhere to the highest ethical standards. We have also instituted an innovative approach to reviewing ethical behavior by assigning our revered retired judges to decide whether there exists probable cause in cases involving unethical conduct. **PA 05-183—signed by the governor**

Standards for Contracting

In the wake of the scandal in former Governor Rowland's office, we continued our efforts to tighten standards for procurement and contracting that had so unfortunately been violated by the previous administration. This year the legislature established the State Contracting Standards Board to oversee both state contracting and procurement. Our bill required this new board to be composed of very experienced individuals who will work to improve accountability and ensure that taxpayer dollars are used in an efficient and ethical manner. In addition, we have tightened emergency contracts by requiring a two-thirds vote of the legislature before being awarded. **PA 05-286—vetoed by the governor**

Privatization Standards

In order to ensure that our tax dollars are used as wisely as possible, common-sense legislation was passed that requires state agencies to more comprehensively analyze their options for purchasing goods and for privatizing state services before deciding whether to sign the check. Our legislation establishes standards for procurement and privatization that ensure we are getting the best bang for our buck. It also protects against contracting with a business that has a poor record of service, and it helps stem the loss of jobs that privatization can often cause. **PA 05-286—vetoed by the governor**

SAVING THE SUB BASE—AN UPDATE



For over a century, Connecticut's submarine industry—centered in Groton around the U.S. Navy submarine base and the Electric Boat shipbuilding yard—has been a major economic force in the state. Half of the nearly 200 submarines built for the U.S. Navy have been constructed in Connecticut; the other half of the sub force was built by one of six other contractors. Today, there are more than 520 firms from nearly every town in the state employing more than 31,000 people who make parts for the submarine industry. The proposed closure of the Groton sub base could spawn an economic disaster that would devastate the southeastern Connecticut economy and potentially send ripple effects throughout the state. We in the state legislature are doing everything in our power to prevent that from happening.

This year, we have been working on various ways to enhance state support for Connecticut's submarine industry in anticipation that the Pentagon might recommend—as it did on that fateful day of Friday the 13th of May—closure of the Groton base. Working on a bipartisan basis with a broad coalition of military, industry, economic and political experts, we developed a number of innovative ideas that could potentially enhance the base's operations in the eyes of the Pentagon—and at the same time enhance Connecticut's submarine industry as a whole—while simultaneously sending a signal to the Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission that we are completely committed to being active and responsive partners in the sub base's future.

We passed a bill providing \$10 million to be used to enhance the submarine base's infrastructure, and included another \$1 million to support a unique public-private technology partnership.

We'll continue to work diligently with the governor, our congressional delegation and military specialists to explain why it's in America's best strategic interests, and the nation's best economic interests, to retain the Groton sub base.

PROTECTING CONSUMERS



Return Policy in Stores

Retailers will now have to provide consumers with written warnings if they limit the number or dollar amount of returns to be made by consumers. These policies must be clearly posted in the store for consumers. Stores that fail to refund or give store credit to consumers who have met the posted return/refund policy could be guilty of unfair trade practices under the new law. Consumers would also have to be notified, in writing, by any retailer who intends to terminate that consumer's ability to return goods.

PA 05-138—signed by the governor

Gift Cards

Gift cards are one of the most popular retail purchases. In 2003, we passed legislation that prohibited gift certificates from having an expiration date and banned retailers from charging "inactivity fees" on gift certificates that may be laying dormant or forgotten, perhaps in your kitchen drawer. However, if a gift certificate had remained unused for 3 years, it would have been considered abandoned property and turned over to the State Treasurer's office until claimed by its rightful owner. This session, we passed some consumer-friendly legislation that makes a good law even better. Now, gift cards will be exempt from the abandoned property statute, and they won't be turned over to the state if unused. Connecticut consumers can now rest assured that any gift card sold in the state truly does not have an expiration date. *PA 05-189—signed by the governor*

Protecting Consumers Who Get Income Tax Refund Anticipation Loans

Many tax preparation services offer their clients the opportunity to get a loan in advance of an anticipated tax return. However, these loans often carry exorbitant interest rates, and their terms aren't always clear to borrowers. Under legislation passed this session, the providers of these kinds of loans can't charge more than 60% annual interest in the first 21 days of the loan, and the rate is limited to 20% beginning on the 22nd day of the loan until it's repaid. This legislation will help protect some of our state's most vulnerable residents from this subtle form of predatory lending. *PA 05-107—signed by the governor*

Requiring Consumer Credit Bureaus to Offer Security Freezes

With identity theft on the rise, it is important that greater protection be afforded to consumers. As a result of legislation that we passed this session, consumers are now allowed to freeze their credit report in order to guard against potential fraudulent access and tampering. Once a credit report is frozen, a credit rating agency is prohibited from releasing it without the consumer's authorization. The legislation also requires businesses to inform consumers if there has been a security breach using their personal information. Now consumers have more control of their private financial information and are further safeguarded against unlawful activity. *PA 05-148—signed by the governor*

Energy Independence

We constantly hear about rising energy prices across the nation and the effect they have on our everyday lives. We are paying more at the pump for our gas and more for heating oil and natural gas to heat our homes in the colder weather. Here in Connecticut we also face the problem of increased electricity costs. These costs are primarily due to congestion on the electric system and too few electric generation plants in our state. Moreover, beginning in 2006, the federal government will begin assessing an additional fee called LICAP to Connecticut consumers, which could cost our residents and businesses nearly \$4 billion over the next 5 years.

We passed legislation this session establishing several initiatives to reduce these charges. These incentives include providing operating cost subsidies and long-term financing for certain customers if they install distributed generation facilities, which are run off the electric grid, such as fuel cells or micro turbines. The use of distributed generation will help to eliminate or at least reduce the load on the system, especially when used at peak demand. The bill also requires the CT Department of Utility Control (DPUC) to request proposals to identify measures that would reduce congestion costs over the next 5 years. These measures, among others in the legislation, may help to reduce congestion along electric lines in our state. This bill—along with our conservation efforts—can make a big difference in our energy outlook. *PA 05-1, June Special Session—signed by the governor*

Restaurant Wine Purchases

Patrons of Connecticut's restaurants will now be allowed to take home the unused portion of one bottle of wine if they purchased it at a restaurant while eating a full-course meal. Under current law, some restaurants were allowing patrons to take their wine home and some were not. The new law helps protect consumers, potentially serves as a deterrent to driving under the influence and treats patrons in restaurants throughout the state equally. *PA 05-134—signed by the governor*

Heat & Utility Surcharges in Leases

The legislature banned the use of utility surcharges by landlords in rental agreements that have heat and utilities included in the rent. This prohibition will apply to rental agreements or renewals beginning October 1, 2005. *PA 05-56—signed by the governor*

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT



Farmland Preservation

Connecticut has a long history of protecting and preserving its farmland. Much of Connecticut's unique beauty can be found in its pristine open space. Not only are our farmlands a valuable resource simply for their beauty and open space, they're also critically important to the state's economy. That's why we passed legislation establishing a matching grant program to help towns and cities promote and sustain local agricultural activity. This legislation also establishes the "Connecticut Farm Link Program," a database for farmers who intend to sell their farm operations or farmland. People interested in starting or expanding an agricultural business can access the database through the state Department of Agriculture and find the land or equipment they need. Lastly, the bill establishes a fund to help promote historic preservation, affordable housing programs, open space and agriculture. **PA 05-228—signed by the governor**

Clean Car Tax Incentives

It's nearly impossible to watch television or read the newspaper without hearing about alternative fuel or hybrid vehicles. In addition to increased fuel efficiency, these vehicles also emit lower emissions. We passed legislation this session that could potentially result in greater incentives for consumers to purchase such fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly automobiles. The Commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Protection, representatives from the federal Environmental Protection Agency and others will develop a plan to shrink the sales tax on these cars, and to consider increasing the sales tax on vehicles—such as certain behemoth SUVs—that emit higher emissions. **SA 05-6—signed by the governor**

Frederick Law Olmsted Day

Parks in urban areas are wonderful places for people to play and groups to gather, providing an escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. Connecticut native Frederick Law Olmsted, who is considered the founder of American landscape architecture (he planned Central Park in New York City), contributed greatly to the state's urban parks, including Hartford's park system and the Beardsley Park in Bridgeport. To honor Olmsted's legacy, we passed legislation establishing April 26th as "Frederick Law Olmsted Day." **PA 05-179—signed by the governor**

Plans of Conservation and Development

Smart growth is a term that has become popular in describing certain ways to develop and use land. Although there's no one definition of smart growth, it generally refers to the practice of saving natural resources from unnecessary development, targeting development in areas where there is already existing infrastructure (such as water, electricity, streets and sewers) and avoiding using taxpayer money to support sprawl. One way to accomplish smart growth is to draft consistent, effective and useful plans of conservation and development. We passed legislation this session that calls for changes in such plans to help achieve just that. These changes include requiring the state Plan of Conservation and Development to identify areas suitable for mixed-use development. They also necessitate consistency among the state, regional and local plans and establishment of a process for the state Office of Policy and Management to designate priority-funding areas ripe for development. **PA 05-205—signed by the governor**

Bi-State Long Island Sound Committee

Long Island Sound is one of Connecticut's greatest natural resources. Its fragile environment and unique beauty make it not only an economic treasure, but also a recreational asset. Since we share the Sound with New York, it's important that we work together to protect it. We passed legislation this session to create a new Bi-State Long Island Sound Committee responsible for recommending legislation to avoid and mitigate the impact of any potential industrialization of the Sound, such as the proposed Broadwater floating liquefied natural gas facility. The committee will consist of 9 members from Connecticut and 9 members from New York who will work to ensure that our best interests for Long Island Sound are protected. **PA 05-137—signed by the governor**

Bottle Bill

Recycling is a simple yet effective way to help keep our environment clean. Many state residents already recycle by taking advantage of our existing bottle redemption law and return their cans and bottles for 5 cents. This session, the Senate passed legislation to expand this law to include water containers. Unfortunately, this important piece of legislation was not enacted into law. **SB 871—passed Senate only**

Broadwater Liquefied Natural Gas Facility

This session, the Senate created a sixteen-member task force to monitor the proposed Broadwater Energy Liquefied Natural Gas regasification unit in Long Island Sound. The task force was to be charged with analyzing the proposal for its broad impacts, and it would submit testimony to the federal and New York State regulatory agencies regarding the proposal. The task force would have submitted annual reports of its activities to the General Assembly. This task force would ensure that this project is completed in the safest manner for our environment, our citizens and our communities. **SB 1087—passed Senate only**

Connecticut Clean Diesel Plan

The General Assembly passed new legislation requiring the state Department of Environmental Protection to develop a diesel emissions reduction strategy for the state. The DEP will make recommendations to the General Assembly, no later than January 15, aimed at reducing diesel emissions and diesel particulate. With recommendations in hand, the legislature will be better equipped to take action to reduce diesel emissions and improve air quality in our state. **SA 05-7—signed by the governor**

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



School Nutrition

Much media attention has focused recently on the epidemic of overweight and obese children. Overweight children can face severe health problems, such as asthma, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. And once a child becomes obese, he or she is much more likely to be an overweight or obese adult—making him or her more at risk for major health conditions like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, gallbladder disease, and cancer. This session, the legislature took action to ensure that our schools are setting the proper example for, and working with, parents to help reverse this trend. Instead of high-fat, high-sugar, nutritionally-void snacks like chips and candy, our kids would have been allowed to purchase only healthy snacks in schools. And young children, through fifth grade, would have been given twenty minutes of recess daily, to help ensure that they get at least a minimal amount of physical activity each day. This law made Connecticut a leader in combating the major health condition of obesity—and it would have made our schools a model for the rest of the country. *PA 05-117—vetoed by the governor*

HUSKY for Adults

Several years ago, the legislature expanded the successful HUSKY health insurance program for kids to some of the neediest parents in our state. We did so recognizing the real difference it makes in people's lives to have health insurance—physically, emotionally, and also financially. Over 10,000 working parents in our state were slated to lose coverage this past April. We were proud to take on this issue early this session, ensuring that these parents would not lose their coverage in April, by extending coverage to the end of the June. Now we are even prouder to continue this worthy program for at least the next two years. The HUSKY program works to help increase access to quality healthcare in our state. *PA 05-1—signed by the governor; and PA 05-280—signed by the governor*

Minimum Wage

Connecticut is certainly a desirable place to live and, as a result, a costly place to live. We recognize our state's high cost of living and commit ourselves each year to help our state's working families. This year we passed legislation increasing the minimum wage to \$7.40/hour in 2006 and \$7.65/hour in 2007. This will help many people statewide keep pace with inflation and be more active participants in Connecticut's economy. *PA 05-32—signed by the governor*

Resale of Recalled Children's Products

With so many children's products on the market, it is difficult to keep current about which ones are recalled by manufacturers. In some cases, these products are resold and their 'recalled' status is not divulged. The state Senate passed legislation this session that would have helped prohibit this activity. The Commissioner of the Department of Consumer Protection would have been required to adopt regulations to prevent the sale, resale or lease of a children's toy or product intended for children that has been recalled by the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission. The regulation would also have addressed keeping these toys out of daycare facilities. Unfortunately, this initiative to help protect our children from dangerous products was not enacted into law. ***SB 480—passed Senate only***

Keeping Our Kids Safe on School Buses

Each day, parents entrust others with the safety and well being of their children. From school bus drivers to teachers, it is paramount that those individuals coming into contact with our children are responsible people. That's why this session the Senate passed legislation that would require the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to allow for additional safeguards when licensing school bus drivers. In addition to criminal background checks already being performed, the DMV would have been required to check the state child abuse registry to determine if an applicant has a documented case of substantiated child abuse. Providing the DMV with access to this important information is one more way we can protect our precious cargo on their way to school. Unfortunately, this important initiative was not enacted into law this year. ***SB 505—passed Senate only***

Pesticide Spraying at Schools and Daycares

Pesticides play an important role in lawn care management by controlling the spread of weeds, insects, rodents and bacteria, among other known pests. But pesticides can also be dangerous to people and the environment when not applied correctly or responsibly. This session, we passed legislation further restricting the use of lawn care pesticides at preschools and elementary schools, and at child day care centers and group day care homes. When there is an immediate and direct threat to human health, certain pesticide spraying will still be allowed at certain facilities. This legislation will help protect the health and safety of our most precious and vulnerable citizens-our children. ***PA 05-252—signed by the governor***

Civil Unions

New legislation authorizes same sex couples to enter into civil unions, granting them the same legal benefits, protections and responsibilities as married couples. It establishes eligibility, application and licensing criteria; specifies who can perform civil union ceremonies; and sets forth record-keeping requirements for these unions. These couples will now have inheritance rights, hospital visitation rights, crime victim rights and other stipulated rights. This landmark law is an important step forward in full equality for all citizens. ***PA 05-10—signed by the governor***

PROTECTING SENIORS



Independent Transportation Networks and Funding Dial-a-Ride

Many senior citizens decide to stop driving but still need to get to stores, appointments and social events. This mobility is key to their desire to remain in their own homes and communities, and to retain independence and dignity. This session, the General Assembly proudly passed legislation that will help four towns create regional transportation systems in which volunteers and paid drivers would use their own vehicles to transport the elderly. Once up and running, these programs will be self-sustaining. Also, the legislature provided \$5 million in state funds for each of the next two years to help fund Dial-a-Ride for our elderly and disabled residents. These programs can make a real difference in the lives of elderly residents of our state. **PA 05-280—signed by the governor**

Protecting Seniors in Annuity Transactions

Many seniors depend on income from annuities as part of their retirement planning. However, some of the terms and conditions of these financial products are complex and confusing and we want to protect seniors from those who would take advantage of them. The legislature enacted a law requiring the state Insurance Commissioner to adopt regulations establishing standards for the purchase of these products and procedures for making annuity sales or exchange recommendations. **PA 05-57—signed by the governor**

HONORING THOSE WHO SERVE



Military Assistance Package

The debt we owe our veterans can never truly be paid in full. Our nation's most recent war on terrorism has created a new generation of veterans and a new sense of commitment to those who served their country. Thanks to the newly established Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the Connecticut General Assembly is more focused than ever on helping soldiers who have done so much for us.

The Legislature passed a Military Assistance Package this year that will create, expand and extend more benefits to our state's veterans. *PA 05-3, June Special Session—signed by the governor*

- We will offer death benefits to certain surviving family members of Connecticut-based active duty servicemen and -women, so that the families of those who don't return will have more financial assistance to rely upon.
- The bill also creates a database of veterans so that the state can more effectively reach out to those in need.
- Similarly, the state of Connecticut will create a single toll-free number that all veterans in the state can call to get answers to any questions they might have about the benefits to which they are entitled.
- Military families may also get a form of relief by not being charged interest on their property tax, if they are unable to pay because of deployment.
- There is also established a Military Family Relief Fund, to which residents can voluntarily contribute through their state income tax returns. This Fund will be used to help military families cope with the everyday expenses that a family with a reduced income might have trouble affording.
- As another small token of appreciation, the state will also give these families a \$50 stipend every month that a member of the National Guard is deployed, up to \$500.

In-State Tuition for Military Stationed in Connecticut

There are a significant number of military personnel stationed in Connecticut, often living a mobile life traveling from one post to another. While they are living in our state they should be treated like one of our own. Thanks to a new law, those individuals will be treated like bona fide Connecticut residents, entitled to in-state tuition rates at our state universities and colleges. Connecticut has some of the best higher education institutions in the country, and these servicemen and women will be able to take advantage of their proximity to them. *PA 05-3, June Special Session—signed by the governor*

Depleted Uranium

Some of the dangers our military men and women face are not from battle, but from where they work and live. Depleted uranium is used extensively in armor plating on our tanks and vehicles used in modern combat. It is also used in ammunition as well. There is growing concern among veterans that the use of this product is not as safe as once thought. Not enough has been done to pursue and investigate complaints about the health of soldiers returning from the Middle East and Afghanistan. The General Assembly decided this session that these concerns were too important to wait any longer. The Legislature passed a bill to establish a task force to look into the health impact of depleted uranium and other substances, as well as create a registry for recently returned veterans to gain medical information so we can get a better understanding of the scope of the problem. *PA 05-3, June Special Session—signed by the governor*

Extension of Insurance Coverage Based on Military Service

Until now, health insurance that parents have for their children attending college full-time ended shortly after their children turned 23 years of age. However, due to our troubled times, many students have had interruptions during their college years because they have been serving our country in the armed forces or reserves. Those students' coverage would have ended after their 23rd birthday even if they had spent time in the military. The state Senate passed legislation to correct that situation—coverage would continue beyond the 23rd birthday for a length of time equal to the students' military service. This bill was a small gesture of gratitude for our young men and women in uniform, which also promoted higher education. Unfortunately, it was not enacted into law this year. *SB 24—passed Senate only*

HEALTH AND SAFETY



Medical Malpractice

After receiving complaints from physicians about skyrocketing medical malpractice insurance rates, we passed a comprehensive reform package last year that unfortunately was vetoed by then-Governor Rowland. This year, the legislature went back to work to address this crisis, and we passed a bill designed to limit the growth of malpractice insurance rates while protecting patients' access to quality health care. The package includes:

- Increased patient safety measures, such as requiring hospitals to use better identification procedures and protocols before surgery
- Reforms to the judicial system, such as requiring mediation between the parties, to expedite these often-lengthy cases and reduce attorney costs
- A requirement that our state insurance commissioner consider companies' proposed rates before they are applied, with the power to approve, deny or modify them

This balanced approach addresses the issues brought to us by the insurance companies, doctors and lawyers involved in these cases, and most importantly, it works to improve the safety of patients in our state. *PA 05-275—signed by the governor*

Breast Cancer Screening

Screening and early detection of breast cancer have a major impact on treatment of the disease. Most women are aware they should get a mammogram annually if they are 40 years of age or older, but many do not follow that advice. Moreover, for some women with dense breast tissue, mammograms are not the most effective screening tool. Ultrasound screening can be a more effective and efficient screening technique for these women. This session we were proud to pass legislation requiring insurance companies to provide coverage for ultrasound screening for certain classified women when recommended by a physician. *PA 05-69—signed by the governor*

Infertility Coverage

A child can bring so much joy to the world, but for tens of thousands of couples in Connecticut with fertility problems, having a child of their own has been an unreachable goal. Infertility is a disease, which is often treatable, but which generally is not covered by health insurance plans. This session, the legislature voted to require Connecticut-regulated insurance companies to pay for certain fertility treatments. Further specific information can be obtained from your insurance company. This bill may help many couples in our state achieve their dream of having children. *PA 05-196—signed by the governor*

Stem Cell Research

Medical innovations are changing the way we approach health and sickness. New cutting-edge research has the potential to discover treatments and cures for debilitating diseases like diabetes, Parkinson's disease, certain cancers and multiple sclerosis. This remarkable research involves the use of embryonic stem cells. This session, the legislature took action to place strict limits on stem cell research conducted in our state—and to ban human cloning—while sending the message that Connecticut supports research that is conducted ethically and professionally. Moreover, we will invest \$100 million over ten years in this research in an attempt to attract research scientists to our state. This legislation and commitment can bring new, high-level jobs to our state, and—more importantly—the research conducted could save lives. *PA 05-149—signed by the governor*

Organ Donation

Medical technology has made it possible to improve and save lives with organ and tissue donations. Decisions about donations can be made after someone dies, but that decision often falls to the family to make at a difficult time. This bill allows state residents to designate their choice to donate their organs when they apply for identification cards obtained at the state Department of Motor Vehicles. Having one's donation wishes known facilitates the donation process, which can make a real difference when time is critical. *PA 05-121—signed by the governor*

Food Allergies

Over 11 million Americans have food allergies, and the prevalence and severity of those allergies are on the rise. People with food allergies have enormous difficulty eating in restaurants, because they may not know all the ingredients in the foods they wish to order. While food-allergic adults, and parents of food-allergic children, must take responsibility for asking about ingredients in food, they may be unaware of other foods cooked nearby, which can lead to cross-contamination. That's why every restaurant should have someone with knowledge of food allergies on staff. This bill requires that people licensed as qualified food operators in Connecticut have proven knowledge and understanding of food allergies. This important bill can help raise awareness of the issues surrounding food allergies and may help save lives. *PA 05-122—signed by the governor*

Mercury Warnings

Although fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet, almost all contain traces of mercury. While this small amount of mercury would have little effect on adults, some levels can potentially be harmful to fetuses and young children. It is important that the public, especially pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, nursing mothers and parents of young children be educated about which fish and shellfish to avoid and which contain smaller amounts of mercury. The state Senate passed legislation that would have required establishments that sell raw fish or shellfish for off-premises consumption to provide pamphlets concerning the level of mercury in their products. Unfortunately, this public health initiative to spread the word about the hazards of mercury for women and children was not enacted into law. *SB 876—passed Senate only*

Restaurant Safety & Choking

Connecticut restaurant employees and restaurant operators are now required to be familiar with the indications that a person is choking and with the appropriate steps to aid a choking victim. Restaurants will also be required to post signs for employees that explain how to recognize that a person is choking and the proper first aid actions to take. The law will make restaurant patrons safer throughout the state. *PA 05-134—signed by the governor*

Requiring Mobile Home Parks to Provide Notice of Health and Safety Standards

Homeowners have the right to know when there are potential health and safety risks in their surroundings, but until now, residents of mobile home parks were not necessarily made aware of such risks by the owners of the park. That's why we passed legislation that will require mobile home park owners to notify their residents if there is a violation, or potential violation, of an environmental law enforced by the state Department of Environmental Protection. *PA 05-222—signed by the governor*

Immunity for Use of Cartridge Injectors

Quick reactions to allergic reactions can mean the difference between life and death. If someone hesitates to act on the victim's behalf because of concerns about civil liability, the results could be disastrous. This legislative session we passed a bill to help protect these good Samaritans. Now when someone at a before or after school program, camp or a daycare facility uses a cartridge injector to help save the life of someone in their care, they can do so free from fear of litigation.

PA 05-144—signed by the governor

Carbon Monoxide Detectors in New Houses

According to the federal government, carbon monoxide poisoning kills over 200 people every year. The General Assembly recognized that lives would also be saved by the use of carbon monoxide detectors. Starting October 1, 2005, all new residential construction in Connecticut will not only require the installation of smoke detectors, but also the installation of carbon monoxide detectors. *PA 05-161—signed by the governor*

Protective Orders

Victims of domestic violence are vulnerable members of our society. Protecting them from further violence and threats are a priority of the Connecticut General Assembly. This year the state legislature passed significant legislation to further extend protection to those in jeopardy. This bill increases the penalty for violating a restraining order from a Class A Misdemeanor to a Class D Felony. This means that a criminal who violates these orders could face up to 5 years in jail. This bill further protects victims of harassment by allowing judges to issue protective orders for people convicted of harassing someone if the judge believes the victim has reasonable fear for his or her safety. *PA 05-147—signed by the governor*

Notification of the Victim Advocate When a Prisoner is Released

One of the roles of the Office of the Victim Advocate is to notify victims when prisoners are released from prison. This year the Connecticut General Assembly further extended this notification system to those prisoners on furloughs through programs to reintroduce them to society. Protecting victims by keeping them informed is one way to keep Connecticut safe. *PA 05-68—signed by the governor*

Giving Law Enforcement Access to Phone and Internet Records

While modern technology has given law enforcement new tools to fight crime, it has also created new challenges that must be overcome. Because of concerns about the privacy of customers, communications companies have been reluctant to give law enforcement the information they need to track down criminals. Thanks to a new state law, these companies are now able to give these officials basic information after receiving a court order, without revealing personal e-mails or phone conversations, striking a balance between public safety and our right to privacy. Now Internet predators and other such perpetrators can't use modern science to hide from the long arm of the law. *PA 05-182—signed by the governor*

TRANSPORTATION



Cell Phones

Beginning October 1, 2005, there will be new restrictions on cell phones to deal with distracted driving and help reduce safety hazards on Connecticut's roadways. Legislation passed this year bans the operation of a motor vehicle while the driver is using a cell phone unless the driver utilizes a hands-free device on the phone. The law further restricts mobile phone usage by completely banning their use by school bus drivers and drivers under 18, except in emergencies. This bill doesn't stop at cell phones but also puts additional penalties for those drivers who have committed a violation while engaged in any distracting activity that interferes with driving. *PA 05-159 as amended by PA 05-220—signed by the governor*

Child Restraints

Booster seat legislation should improve the safety of young children riding in motor vehicles. Car crashes continue to be the leading cause of death among young children. While seat belts in cars have saved countless lives, they don't provide adequate protection for small children—the shoulder belt can't be adjusted in most vehicles to a position that prevents potential injury to small children. Booster seats are the best way to transport children who are too big for a car seat but can't fit safely in a shoulder belt. Current state law requires that children under the age of 4 or under 40 pounds in weight be secured in a child safety seat. Starting October 1, Connecticut will mandate a child restraint system for all children under the age of 7 or under 60 pounds. *PA 05-58—signed by the governor*

Restrictions on Mini-Motorcycles

The legislature has moved to deal with the problems caused by the growing number of mini-motorcycles on the streets of Connecticut. Many youths too young to get a driver's license but seeking the freedom of driving have started buying mini-motorcycles or so-called "pocket bikes." Because of a loophole in our laws regarding motorized vehicles, these motorcycles are not required to be registered, nor are the operators required to have a driver's license. These vehicles are being driven on sidewalks and roads often frightening pedestrians and creating safety hazards. These bikes are so small that often, automobile drivers can't see them, and accidents can result. Local law enforcement and city officials have been frustrated by the inability to restrict their use and control their abuse. Thanks to a new law, these vehicles are banned from use on any public road, sidewalk or public land. These mini-motorcycles will be restricted to private land where the operator has permission to use them. *PA 05-173—signed by the governor*

Under 18 Drivers' Licenses

Protecting our newest drivers continues to be a priority for the General Assembly and that has prompted some new guidelines for teen drivers. This session, legislation was passed to prohibit 16- and 17-year-old drivers from driving between 12:00 midnight and 5:00 a.m. unless they are going to or from work or school, or for religious or medical reasons. The bill further ensures our most inexperienced drivers are given more on the road training than in the past before obtaining their licenses. *PA 05-54—signed by the governor*

Transportation Initiative

Progress is being made to upgrade Connecticut's transportation system to reduce the critical problem of gridlock on our roads. Traffic congestion costs our citizens time, money and gas. This problem increases our dependency on foreign oil while contributing to pollution. The legislature, along with the governor, formed the Transportation Strategy Board to thoroughly examine and prioritize transportation projects that will help control traffic, promote economic growth and preserve our quality of life. This year the legislature took the first step to implement this plan with Connecticut's biggest investment in transportation in two decades. Furthermore, we will make the biggest investment in mass transit in state history. Over the next decade we will invest hundreds of millions of dollars in improving Interstate 95, one of the most congested highways in America. At the same time we will purchase 342 new rail cars for the Metro North Railroad. These new cars will replace rail cars well past their life expectancy, modernize a fleet that has been plagued by reliability concerns, and expand the capacity of one of the most successful commuter rail lines in the country. This initiative will help commuters and our state's economy as well. *PA 05-4—signed by the governor*